

Front Porch Review



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On a Clear Day You Can See the South

- Timothy Resau



A Slow Unpacking
- Joyce Compton Brown

'You don't love because: you love despite; not for its virtues but despite its faults.'
William Faulkner

I've been dragging an old bag
of Southern through the years –
all those grandfathers, some with the spiteful
gray uniform – mothers, with their recipes
for reunion days, the easy naiveté
of a small town – Neil's Grocery, and Poole's
Dime – where I learned to make change,
to be taught that racism was the norm.

And these old churches,
town cornerstones, the stiff Lutheran
one, packed with lists of don't's,
but spilling forth sweet harmony
in roiling tunes. Teetotaler weddings
with Kool Aid punch and butter mints
underlaid by good moonshine stories
of my German grandfathers –

their pride, their love of land, their greed.
Grandmothers bearing too many children
for working the farm, cooking, canning,
tending the garden till they dropped.
Mine is a too-pale Southernness –
pale mayors, sheriffs, and county registrars,
Where tax officers charged two dollars
for a black man to vote if he didn't own land.
And how could he possibly own land?

And still I speak with dropped *gs* and extra *rs*.
icons of my roots. But oh, ice cream churns
and watermelons cracking open on the front
porch and county fairs and lightning bugs,
reunions, country fried steak and my mother's
chocolate pie – all in that burdensome
bag of old joys, sorrows, and regrets
brimming with forgiveness and hope.

Far from Maddening Crowd
- Michael De Rosa



A Wedding Among Nomads
- David Chorlton

Sand rains over the chosen two.
The sky is their burnt canopy.
They swear allegiance to the shifting ground

as they climb the pedestal
to be joined in drought and thrown to chance.
A curtain for the night is drawn around them

while guests light fires, gamble,
recite narratives of war
and lie down with visions

welling in their milky eyes.
Wedding gifts are stacked
into a pyramid, with fruit

and amulets enough for a lifetime.
The yellow storm subsides
and dream smoke

curls above the camp
where fortune tellers are debating
whether a day or fifty years

await the man and wife.
They shake their heads and scatter ashes
around the marriage bed. Nothing

is certain, they say. And the tribes
go separate ways, to meet again
perhaps in peace or with weapons drawn
and nothing left to bargain with.

Movers and Shakers

- Joseph Glaser





After a Man
- Will Reger

My mother was a round
nosegay of pansies.
In her sleeveless muumuu
she bore me here and there
along the great Muddy,
perhaps not once aware
of her place under the sky.
If she had been a gypsy
or a war refugee, her path
might have made more sense.
But, no, she followed a man.
Her rootlessness was in love.

Now she is old and sits alone
in a room she shares with stones.
Not stones for casting first,
but stones for polishing,
stones for giggling over
for their likeness to faces,
stones for setting in bottles
to glow in the dying sun.
Stones for piling in her corners
to keep her old soul in place,
to keep her from floating off
after a dream or a vision,
or after a man.

Prairie in Winter
- Flo Hayes



Five Minutes to Eighty
- Claire Scott

Have you noticed
how you cling to
the banister going downstairs
how you leave sticky notes
on the counter, the mirror
the fridge and forget to read them
have you noticed
how you drive more slowly
get lost coming home from Lucky's
crawl like a banana slug on freeways
unhappy cars honking behind you
what of boots left listless
no longer hiking alone with a bag
of trail mix and a crumpled map

Have you noticed
how you no longer pay attention to time
watching old movies past midnight
Apocalypse Now, Star Wars
eating Oreos in bed
crumbs sprinkled on the sheets
waking to noon's pointed light
have you noticed
how you let laundry pile high
dust settle on chairs
bills stack on your desk
while you read Alice Walker
and write poems for your own pleasure
have you noticed

Getting to the church on time
- Peter Morris



Flash Mob
- Sara Eddy

One kid stands up in the all-school assembly.
Heads jerk. We think of gunshot & blood,
but the boy opens his mouth around a clear bell voice,

and the people relax. Other kids join,
then the cool teachers willing to be foolish
to shore up belief in a loving universe.

They're dancing, singing, it's joyful and awkward.
And now I'm crying – no, really crying, close
to sobbing – inner floodgate collapsing

for this earnest fragility, this simple, sturdy fidelity.

Doppelgänger
- Terri Berry



Heart-piercing Flower
- Douglas J. Lanzo

lone wildflower
pierces the snowline
against all odds
until plucked by an orphan
its beauty drawing smiles

Kindred
- KJ Hannah Greenberg





King of the Beggars
- Arthur Davis

I heard the clanging pots before the trumpets. Both were loud, more defiant than I remembered.

“Something’s going on,” my editor at The Globe warned as we emerged from our offices on Murray Street and Broadway into an uncommonly warm September afternoon.

“The Monitor’s behind this,” I said.

“It won’t be for long.”

“You think it’ll fold?”

“I give it a month,” he said.

“It only started publishing earlier this year.”

“Eighteen eighty-seven will be a bad year for that piece of trash.”

I started to walk away when he grabbed my shirtsleeve. “Remember what good reporting is about?”

“What you see is rarely worth reporting. It’s what’s behind what you see that counts?”

“Exactly. The birth of the devil never made the front page,” he said, recounting his favorite investigative expression and then disappearing back into the darkness.

At first the sound was haphazard. There were a lone bagpipe and two men carrying cymbals, the clash of metal on metal designed to startle rather than entertain. I unwrapped a cigar and lit up, possessed this day of an uncommon self-assurance that would result in a revealing article of political intrigue.

I could see heads bobbing and flags waving in the distance though the heart of the crowd could be heard long before you saw the first extremist, or so the Monitor called them. To the Monitor, anyone in conflict with the Republican machine in New York City was labeled extremist. The Monitor was the most recent and ignominious rag in the city.

The ragtag troop streamed around the corner from a cobbled Hudson Street, filling the historic expanse of lower Broadway. Kindred spectators waved to those in the procession, and the rabble responded with spontaneous outcries of “Justice for all.”

Many politicians were uneasy with the attention such parades were getting, calling the finger-pointing and exposition of social ills embarrassing. But these demonstrators seemed careful not to exceed the largesse of the current administration. And in the last few years every move was carefully organized and orchestrated.

Billy Ryan saw to that. Fast Billy, he was called as well as Bareknuckles Billy. The police file on him suggested he was between thirty-five and forty from the notorious Jug’s End section of Philadelphia. And there he was, at the head of the New York troop, protesting the loudest, waving a placard stained red with retribution and threats.

My cauldron of American humanity mixed and fermented but social unrest plagued every big city. There were riots, blatant corruption, police brutality as the faithful press led the pack, hawking populist ideas and sensationalism.

I took another puff and examined the gray ash. A firm ash is the hallmark of a good cigar, and a good cigar the standard among men of character.

A trumpet, two small drums, and a tired fiddle joined the ensemble to produce a sound that was at first poignant, then disquieting as they approached City Hall. Six-foot, two-hundred-

forty-pound, gristled Ryan strode proudly up the street ahead of what I guessed were nearly four hundred howling malcontents.

I first covered the parade two years ago. Ryan's appeal and influence had grown considerably since then. He was given an appointment to present his case to David Leslie Cavanaugh, the New York State Commissioner of Health and Welfare last year in Albany. An influential second-rate politician with a flowing red beard and checkered past, whose love of good press was second only to his attachment to whiskey and very young boys.

The headline under the photo in *The Globe* read, "An Understanding Pledged." Neither could be further from the truth. Cavanaugh and Ryan simply recognized each other's value and strident constitution. Ryan made the third page of the *Herald* that week, then there was nothing for months. Another crisis had gripped the city's imagination. You could set your calendar by every City crisis.

The beggars were a problem that had no immediate solution. They were a constant eyesore exposing the depths of nineteenth century bureaucratic incompetence and indifference. They could temporarily put a cap on crime, but what do you do with the brooding, growing masses of poor and homeless and incapable? Guy Gibbons, the editor at the *Herald*, in an inappropriate jest even for him, suggested nominating them "for political office." Enter enterprising Billy, who had once broken a man's jaw at the Variety Club. It happened by accident, and, in fact, it wasn't in the club but on the street in front of the entrance to that posh saloon.

Danny Malloy was also watching Billy closely, not for his own amusement or because he necessarily believed in this or any cause, but for the Mayor, which is to say for Sweeny O'Rourke, the Mayor's chief aide.

The Mayor had recently voiced a curious interest in the event. It had been a nuisance at first, but as its popularity grew and Ryan's notoriety increased, it had become apparent that political fodder could be gleaned from the dung heap of spectacle.

In the stew of New York City politics, Danny Malloy was not a great fan of Billy Ryan but wanted to make sure that whatever benefits accrued to him or the parade would wash off on his honor and not on an unqualified upstate pervert like Cavanaugh.

Reform was in the air. It had been newsworthy for the last few years. The fire in the Henry Street Children's Hospital guaranteed it a permanency that no one anticipated. Eight children were killed and a score critically burned in a fire that should have never been. The fire department blamed the hospital, and the city blamed both for what was being hawked as a case of gross criminal negligence. Blue Ribbon committees sprouted up quicker than empty beer mugs on St. Patrick's Day.

They were a quarter-mile from City Hall and increasing in number. "Billy's parade," my editor noted, leaving out all those would not give due service or simply dues. Billy was very selective as to whom he allowed to march in the parade. This was his province as if he had been anointed king of the beggars. His moment in the limelight. The benefits had to last him the year. There was a rumor that he was planning something special. That made politicians on both sides of the aisle nervous.

The look on Billy's face was all theater and fanaticism. He was well known for his temper: half theatrics, half brutality, and all conviction. I sensed under that brawling exterior was a quick, manipulative mind that had given up using his fists when he realized his brains were more powerful and could never be shackled.

Two officers spotted me making notations. One was slapping a long Billy club back and forth against his leg. "And you are, sir?"

"David Garrity, from The Globe."

Both were regulars at the City Hall police station. They were a different breed. Openly protective and aggressive to any threat to "His Honor."

"Giving the Mayor a good writeup are we?"

"Always."

"Good. Let's keep it that way," the one with the Billy club said.

The other made a show of writing down my name in his notepad. Both turned and slowly made their way toward the head of the parade. Not a problem. I wrote a very complimentary article about the captain of their station during the summer. Just in case.

As the parade crawled up Broadway, a small group of women peeled off from the sidewalk and flowed toward the head of the parade. All were wearing the most meager collection of rags and tatters. Each carried a small child. Several children were braced by crutches.

The crowd softened as they watched the formation evolve. Within the distance of a block, over a dozen women fanned out on Billy's left and right side. The phalanx didn't speak or taunt or bluster, but it had one effect no one could have predicted. It slowed down the procession. That gave the spectacle a power it could never have achieved out of angry, self-righteous, protest.

Within a block of City Hall there was near silence in the crowd and not a word from Ryan. People were straining out of office windows to see what had happened. A young woman with a clubfoot carrying an infant collapsed.

Billy knelt and helped the young girl to her feet. He wiped the mud off her filthy cape and anchored the wooden staff under her arm. Instead of giving her back her child, Ryan took the little boy in his arms and returned to his rightful place at the front of the parade.

Heads arched to get a good look, but minds were bent. and that lasts forever.

A smile cracked Danny Malloy's brittle face. He appreciated the work of a master. He also knew that a force was being born. And, like any, it could be used for good or evil. He knew that he would have to tell Sweeny O'Rourke who would color the incident for the Mayor's affection.

Truth in all its glory was a commodity and, like sugar or wheat, had a price. And this was a moment for reform. It had captured the City's heart as it had in Chicago and Philadelphia. That meant that the Mayor could be seen to be out of touch with his constituents or the nation's spirit if he remained indecisive. Danny Malloy knew this. He also knew, as did Cavanaugh, that Billy Ryan had a price.

I took another long puff. I wanted something for my efforts too.

Finally the procession arrived at the sliver of a grassy park facing the steps of City Hall. The Beggars' Parade was being choreographed brilliantly. "Brains, not fists," Billy had said to a reporter from the Herald last week. "I can beat you with both." Billy held the child as though he was his own blood. The effect was considerable. Billy approached a line of policemen blocking the path to City Hall.

Time and breath stopped until, finally, one officer moved back. Then another pulled away, until there was space for him to pass. The stirring of crippled women with their charges moved forward behind Billy to the steps of City Hall. The three policemen who let him pass left

their positions and walked up the block toward Chamber Street and disappeared around the corner.

Billy held the child over his head. One of the soiled swaddling rags fell from the baby's body and landed on his shoulder. The child's right foot was missing. The child looked down, began to whimper, and stretched out a hand to his mother standing nearby. Billy turned to his left and right and drew the crowd to a howl. The moment was riveting.

"How many children like this are born every day in this great city? How many children like this get no breakfast and go to bed hungry in this great city? How many children like this will never reach their first birthday? How many of you have a child like this at home or have a brother or sister who has a child like this, or think that having a child like this can never happen to you?"

A police captain moved toward Billy, and just as quickly stopped and backed up the steps.

"How many of you think you can turn your back on this child forever?"

Women in the crowd were weeping openly. There were no drums or cymbals or bagpipes and trumpets. They weren't necessary. A torrent of silence had spoken.

"This child is sick and crippled and frail and might not live out the winter, and all of you in front of me, and especially those in back of me, are to blame. When you go home tonight after work, you will take the image of this boy to bed with you." He held the silence for a moment. "Only you'll be home safe and fed, and this boy will be neither."

Billy Ryan had orchestrated a thunderous symphony of sorrow. He had captured the hearts and cowered the bullies, rallied the faithless and elevated his cause and himself. "We are brothers, or we are nothing. We are of a single mind when it comes to those who cannot help themselves, who have been handicapped by nature and society or who out of circumstances they had no hand in creating, have sunken below a state of street animals. If we let them die, part of us dies. If we let them perish, then our souls will soon follow."

The halo of curious onlookers surrounding the beggars froze into a defenseless shadow of shame.

"How many of you believe that we need to care more and help more and save our children or we will lose ourselves in their death? How many? I ask you how many?"

By the second question nearly everyone in the park was screaming or nodding or praying. Tears were cutting the dirty faces of men who might have spent the previous night savaging their neighbor, brother, or friend.

Ryan held the child high over his head a moment longer then let him down until their eyes met. The boy's tiny hands went out to Bareknuckles Billy as if on cue. Ryan embraced the child. The crowd roared their approval, sending one set of frightened coach horses along with their carriage bolting down Broadway.

Billy gently lowered the boy into his mother's arms. She covered his body in rags and cradled him gently to her bosom. Ryan kissed the boy on the cheeks again, then the woman. The crowd exploded with sympathy.

The Mayor was now in full view from his office window. The crowd just below the steps in the front of the mansion was thick with gawking politicians, reporters, pedestrians, and heartfelt sentiment.

“Pretty impressive,” Danny Malloy boasted, beaming with sanctimonious delight.

“You behind this?”

“I can only take credit for a small part,” he answered.

“Like the police letting him into the park and onto the steps of City Hall?”

“That and, of course, the permit for the parade.”

“In return for?”

“You’re a suspicious man, sir,” Malloy said. “Why don’t we say it’s a gesture of good faith in the man’s compassion.”

“And at getting votes.”

Malloy stiffened with pride. “Mister Ryan is a community leader of some repute. There’s nothing wrong with lending him a hand.”

“As long as he uses it in front of the Mayor, who himself would not dare come out against the Health Commissioner.”

“I hope the Commissioner will be pleased. “

“Hardly. The man thinks he’s got Ryan in his pocket.”

“All David Cavanaugh’s pockets put together could not hold a man like Ryan.”

“As only the Mayor’s pockets can?”

“The Mayor is deeply concerned with the welfare of the children of his city.”

“Hard to measure his compassion before today.”

“Well, then, sir,” he said, taking my arm as the crowd closed in around Ryan, “we’re just going to have to educate you.”

We walked for a while, and I was made aware in detail, though I am sure only a part, of a grander political scheme.

The Mayor had decided to openly support the movement and, in a speech he was giving tomorrow on these same steps with that same woman and her child, he would galvanize the major cities on the east coast into one unified movement. An ambitious plan. And one that might well coalesce into a powerful political force in the next two years right before it was time for national reelections.

“Handsome cigar there.”

“A present from a grateful editor.” I lied.

“I’m sure it was well deserved.”

I noticed several of the women who had marched at Ryan’s side gather. A well-suited man was giving them directions, or a measure of his appreciation along with a small brown envelope. Several of the children were crying, and none of the women seemed to know how a mother would respond.

“A spontaneous demonstration of heartfelt compassion I see.”

Malloy noted my observation. “Is that what you believe, or what will be printed in your column?”

“Should there be a difference?”

“Mister Ryan there,” he began, “is much like you or me. We both know what comes first. In his case it’s the cause that has gotten him exposure. In your case it’s getting access to the front page so you can get a few stories printed and work yourself up to a better rag.”

“Is it all that simple?”

“It’s always been exactly that simple.”

“You have a way with words, Mister Malloy.”

“Danny.”

“Of course, Danny.”

“No, that’s your job. There are better papers in the city, and Sweeny O’Rourke is friends with the editors of most.”

“Then why does he need me?”

“Who says he does?”

“Your friendly manner and sharing this confidence on Ryan.”

“Every paper counts, my boy. Every vote, and every paper, and every reporter. And besides, you’re not half as faltering as the Mayor thought. I’ll mention it to him.”

I was left standing under a maple tree, watching the crowd dissolve as Malloy made his way into the throng to Ryan’s side. A whisper and a nod, and they disappeared into the Mayor’s mansion. I returned to my office and filed my story, an eyewitness to history. My editor loved it. “The Father of Reform” was the title of the piece. The first of a three-part series on the movers and masters of the new reform movement in New York City.

The paper was a sellout.

In many ways we all were.

Compositions
- Edward Lee





Better with Time
- Lorrie Ness

I watch our barn go grey,
camouflaging itself with the sky.
Storms now pass it over, mistaking it for kin.
It's my reminder that ingenuity comes with aging.

Over time, its hardware crumbled.
Loose sheet metal warbles from the roof when the breeze
lips it just right. I let it flap. Screwing it down
would silence its music.

A crosscut saw hangs above the door
rusting toward the ground. Each raindrop is a new wound.
I sacrifice it in the elements — allow its mural
to reach its conclusion.

Dutch elm took the tree by the silo.
I know it attracts termites, that its branches will snap —
but I let it stand. Every summer, woodpeckers
fledge from its core.

Itsy Bitsies
- Len Kazmer







Nostalgia

- M. J. Iuppa

Driving in a hilly countryside, she gazes upon the thick woods, rising on either side. She sees a thin strand of smoke leaking from a small gap in the ridge and wonders who lives there in this remoteness. Did someone stake their claim by stopping at the side of the road, abandoning their rusted gold-toned Impala, with 250,000 miles, and a map of New York State in the glove compartment for a piece of this mountain's legend? Would she be happy, following the deer trail to a clearing among a stand of pines? Looking down into the valley where the lake sits calmly, bluer than the sky, there are women in straw hats harvesting concord grapes. She watches their careful work. Bees appear out of nowhere, sparking in the warm moist air above the full wooden crates. Everything gleams in the flash of light. Her memory – unresolved. Can she find that small gap in the ridge and disappear?

Time After Time
- Talitha May





Rain

- Judy Lorenzen

Rain is song, each drop – a note,
playing the keyboard of memory,
come listen as it fortifies to torrential,
then softens to relief.

But do not stay in the past –
look out the window, watch and hear its musicality.
See it washing the parked cars in front of the house,
puddling up on the sidewalk, splashing as it hits. Watch
its cleansing, forgiving nature – how it nurses the ground,
bringing green to the grass, leaves to the trees.

Hear it sing. Sing with it. Feel new.
Contemplate its culmination saturating this countryside.

Hear its song come down all over the world.

Listen while its end beat fades out
on the windowpane.

Take one last look –
and see its bow
arching to the ends of the earth,
its praise.

Poetic Perspective of Rain

- Michael Lee Johnson



Silence

- Michael Rosenwasser

Silence centers me,
brings me peace,
if only for a brief interlude,
until the rumble of the noises
that are my thoughts, overwhelms.

I play a game I've created,
counting in ascending numbers,
hoping the diversion will
trick me into peace once more.
I seek the silence, the stillness;
seek the moment the mind
can isolate the bass notes,
hear a cardinal cry above the
wind swaying in the branches,
feel the snow hitting the pavement
as a winter storm begins.

The silence.

The freedom from the noises
that fill the air with urgency
and anguish.

The silence.

And the thought of you silent,
at peace,
flashes in me.

Silent.

At peace.

Ghost Tree
- Mary Anne Anderson



Solstice

- Alexander Perez

Snowflakes float quietude down from the soundless sky
to the caroling earth: songs of wind and winter birds,
echoes of keening wolves

even your ax is singing
while the bare trees raise their arms in praise
for the dead's coming transformation into fire

at my kitchen window, quietness comes calm
and for once that day, amidst the work,
heard my hymn, joined the winter chorus

Triplets
- Andrew Graber



Guidelines

We publish thoughtful, provocative fiction, poetry, essays and visual arts.

Submissions are accepted year-round.

- If accepted, submissions may appear in any quarterly issue.
- Biographical information will be requested for accepted submissions.
- If your submission was previously published, please cite the reference.
- Simultaneous submissions should be accompanied by a statement stating so.
- If your work is accepted elsewhere prior to our evaluation, please notify us.
- All work must be original and in English.

We do not publish novel excerpts, memoirs, genre material, flash fiction (less than 1000 words), book reviews, erotica or works which rely upon explicit language or gratuitous violence.

Fiction can be up to 5000 words. It should be relevant to a general audience, compelling and thought provoking. Finally, it should contain a protagonist with a positive, articulated, universal goal (e.g., freedom from oppression) who actively struggles to achieve that goal, overcoming emotional obstacles in the process. We expect the protagonist's values and beliefs to be reflected in his or her behavior, which behavior initiates conflict with other characters. Ideally, the protagonist is motivated by a past wound which he or she attempts to heal. By story's end the protagonist learns something significant about human behavior.

Essays can be up to 5000 words. We do not publish essays which are life stories. We do publish essays which express perspectives about topics of general, timeless interest. That is, we are not interested in essays about current events but are interested in essays about the vagaries of human behavior. An example of an ideal essay is Mark Twain's *Corn-Pone Opinions*.

We are interested in poems which contain vivid images, resonating voice, rich language, discernible rhythm and thoughtful messaging. An example of these attributes is Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*.

Visual arts which elicit the comment, "How interesting!" are desired. Submit visual arts as **.jpg** files; do not send **.tif** or **.bmp** files. Accepted visuals may be reduced to fit the available space.

Mac users, please be sure that your files are readable by Windows 10.

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Accepted material will be edited. If changes are deemed significant, the contributor will be notified and given an opportunity to accept the changes or request that the piece be withdrawn from publication.

Send submissions to gphillips938@comcast.net Send 1 prose piece, 1-5 poems, or 1-4 photos at a time. For prose or poetry, type or paste your submission into the body of the email message.

We will not open any unsolicited print attachments. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments. Include your name and e-mail address.

Please expect to wait up to one month for a reply. Occasionally, with email, there are technical difficulties. We cannot be responsible for delay or loss of submissions. To check on the status of your submission after one month has passed, please send a message to gphillips938@comcast.net.

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